PROVINCIAL LIBRARY
& ARCHIVES
VICTORIA B.C.
SPLENDOR SINE OCCASU

THE GENIUS AND LIFE-WORK

—OF—

LONGFELLOW.

A PAPER READ

BEFORE THE

Literary and Historical Society of Quebec,

7TH MARCH, 1883,

BY

GEO. STEWART, Jr., F.R.S.C.,

First Vice-President of the Society.

(FIFTY COPIES.)

QUEBEC:
PRINTED AT THE "MORNING CHRONICLE" OFFICE.

1883.

PROVINCIAL LIBRARY
VICTORIA, B. C.

B
L8535

CH

TO MY FRIEND,

CHAS. G. D. ROBERTS, M.A.,

The Author of "ORION."

THESE PAGES ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

THE AUTHOR.

199344

The Genius and Life-work of Longfellow.

I have selected as my theme to-night, a poet who has many claims upon your affection, a singer who sang for the whole world, and whose verse breathes only the tenderest, gentlest and most humanizing thoughts and sentiments. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born in Portland, Maine, on the 27th of February, 1807. He was educated at Bowdoin college, where he began his higher studies at the age of 14. In 1825, he was graduated with honours, and entered the law office of his father, the Hon. Stephen Longfellow, but Coke and Blackstone had little charm for him, and he very soon relinquished pleadings and commentaries for the delights of foreign travel. Before starting out on his first journey through Europe, he had been offered a professorship in his *Alma Mater*, and he accepted the position on the condition that he would only assume his duties at the close of his tour. The arrangement being mutually satisfactory, he left America and spent three years and a half in France, Spain, Italy, Holland, Germany, and the British Isles. Returning home in 1829, he at once entered upon his professorship at Bowdoin, and when George Ticknor, the eminent author of the best history of Spanish literature known in the English tongue, resigned in 1835, the chair of Modern Languages, in old Harvard university, Longfellow was appointed to fill the vacancy. To fit himself more fully for his enlarged sphere of action, he again undertook a journey abroad, and sought acquaintance with the language and letters of northern Europe. He devoted twelve months to study, observation and travel in Scandi-

navia, Germany, and the Swiss cantons, and returned to the United States in the autumn of 1836, refreshed in mind and body, and ready for his work. He remained at Harvard as professor until 1854, when he resigned, and was succeeded by his friend and associate, James Russell Lowell,—the distinguished poet and essayist,—known to you all through his inimitable series of Biglow Papers,—and at present United States Minister at the Court of St. James. Whilst an undergraduate, Longfellow began writing poetry, and many of his best pieces appeared in the *Literary Gazette*, a well-conducted periodical in its day, though once the editor, with the usual sapience of editors, who are popularly supposed to know and understand everything, except Quebec politics, advised him to give up poetry and "buckle down to the law." This was odd advice to a man who had produced at the time, such work as the "Hymn of the Moravian Nuns," "The Spirit of Poetry," "Woods in Winter," and "Sunrise on the Hills," but the poet, who fortunately knew himself better than his critic did, and trusted his own powers, kept on throwing from his muse, those wonderful gems of song and poesy, which carry sympathy and delight and joy to thousands of breasts in all lands beneath the sun. During his incumbency at Bowdoin college, he wrote a good deal, in the way of criticism, for the *North American Review*. He published "Outre-mer" in 1835, and "Hyperion" in 1839, both prose works, and singularly graceful in style and spirit. His first collection of poems also appeared in the latter year, under the title of "Voices of the Night." This little book contained, besides the "Midnight Mass for the Dying Year," "The Reaper and the Flowers," and the "Beleaguered City," that famous hymn "A Psalm of Life," which is perhaps better known than anything the poet ever wrote. It seemed at once to take its place among the better poems of the world. It is full of lessons to the young and the old; full of echoes of the heart and soul, full of com-

fort for everybody. It has been translated into nearly all the European languages, as well as into several Asiatic tongues, and its teachings have spread all round the universe of God. How often have you heard these lines :—

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time ;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and ship-wrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate ;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait."

After "Voices of the Night," came in 1842 "Ballads and other Poems,"—full of ringing metres and rapidly-flowing thoughts,—and in the year following, he sent out "Poems on Slavery," exhibiting much of his stronger work, and "The Spanish Student," a drama cast in the Shakesperian mould, vigorous in conception and individuality, marvellous in execution, but incapable of representation on the stage. Its humour is exquisite, and the action free and natural, but even Modjeska, who admired it very much as a dramatic poem, and loved to recite portions of the narrative to small knots of friends, felt that it would never make an acting play. In rapid succession, Longfellow produced, "The Poets and Poetry of Europe," "The Belfry of Bruges," "Evangeline," and the prose story of "Kavanagh." After these came "The Seaside and the Fireside," "The Golden Legend," and the grand "Song of Hiawatha," a poem which attracted a great amount of criticism in its day, and made a very lasting impression on the reading world. "The Courtship of Miles Standish," illustrating in every line the

puritanism in Longfellow's nature, and his rare skill as a sympathetic artist, appeared in 1858, and met with a flattering and kindly reception everywhere. To further enumerate the poet's writings would be mere cataloguing, and it would be wearying to your patience, on the present occasion, to extend the list. I may say, however, that among his more prominent and permanent work, may be placed his admirable translation of Dante,—a stupendous performance,—his beautiful domestic poem of "The Hanging of the Crane," which all young brides should read and learn to repeat by heart,—the "Masque of Pandora," "Keramos," "Ultima Thule," and his last noble effort, "Michael Angelo." These exhibit Longfellow at his best, and shew his many-sidedness, his intimate acquaintanceship with all phases of the human heart, and his love for doing good to his fellow-men. He was a true poet of the affections, of nature in all her moods, and of sentiment. In the humblest homes of England, his is the poetry which makes the lives of their occupants more gentle and pure. In France, in Russia, in Spain and Germany, in Switzerland and in Scandinavia, his verse has wound itself into the souls of the people, whether noble or peasant, and in so loving and unobtrusive a way, that even the native bards of those countries have allowed him to share their popularity, without a murmur. There is hardly a country on the face of the globe to-day, which does not know Longfellow. He is quoted in palace and in hall, in the cottage and in the poorest hut. The great statesmen of the time point their speeches with an apt figure from his muse. The Church, the Bench and the Bar pay tribute to his genius, and embellish their utterances with quotations from his works. The poet has become a household word in the mouths of all. He sang for all the world. Like Milton and Tennyson, he wrote for those of learned leisure; like Burns and Beranger, he sang for the poor and lowly, for

those bowed down with grief, for those who wanted words of comfort to ease the aching heart and the wearied brain, for those who yearned for some joyous melody, some soul-entrancing strains from the music of the spheres. He spoke words of solace to countless thousands, and filled the air with generous songs, and christianized the atmosphere of the doubting. God, Christ and religion, and the fundamental truths were taught by Longfellow, in his splendid way, and who shall not say that he wrought an influence for good that no man can estimate, and few, now living in the realms of song and story, can surpass? To all hearts, he has sung his tender songs, and who can ever forget the majesty of the man, or the sweet earnestness of the poet? No one would wish to blot out a single line from his works. His poetry is the natural outcome of a fresh, pure and lofty soul full of sympathy for those in affliction, full of helpfulness and joy for mankind. His humanity is so broad, his sympathies are so just and true, the spirit of his poetry is so penetrating and catholic, that it would be singular indeed if he failed to exert an influence on the Canadian people as intense and real as it is in his own country. The esteem in which his writings are everywhere held throughout the Dominion, is naturally enough, very high and cordial. For several years past, Canadian authorship has been largely indebted to American letters for many refining influences and teachings in the science of intellectual development. American thought has influenced Canadian thought. The idealism of Emerson, the transcendentalism of Alcott, and the Unitarianism of Channing or of Clarke have not carried many away, but their influence, though in a slight degree, will be admitted. The excessive morality of these men has awakened something more than a mere echo across their own border. Their teachings, however, have only found pupils among the class which seeks enlightenment in a certain department of human thought, and consequently the

constituency is not large. American poetry has had no battle to fight, no prejudices to overcome, except the prejudice of ignorance, and the Canadian mind readily accepted the songs of Whittier, of Longfellow, of Bryant, and of Holmes, and ranked them with some of the best efforts of that other English literature across the sea.

For a variety of reasons, Longfellow's verse has always maintained a strong hold on the Canadian public, and to-day his writings have a larger circulation in Canada than those of any four living poets combined, and the list may comprehend Tennyson and Robert Browning. The institutions of Canada, its system of education, and the natural features of its civilization have so much in common with those of the United States, that the whole range of American poetry can offer little that Canadians may not appreciate and accept. They may not care to throw up their caps over the poetic celebrations of American victories over British arms, but such domestic pictures as are met with in the "Hanging of the Crane," such stalwart writing as is given in the "Skeleton in Armour," such vigorous story-telling as is found in "Miles Standish," in "Evangeline," and in "The New England Tragedies," have long ago won a place in the Canadian heart, which is destined to endure.

But while Longfellow's writings influence much of the thought which finds an outcome in the poetic efforts of what may be locally called Canadian literature; it must be conceded that his power more keenly asserts itself in the individual lives of the people themselves, the readers of good books, and the lovers of true poetry. The territorial vastness of the Dominion must be taken into account, in any consideration which may be made of the influencing tendencies of his work on Canadian life and activity. In Nova Scotia, for instance, the one descriptive poem which he has written about that province, has made his name loved and venerated throughout its length and breadth. All

through that section, Longfellow's poems have penetrated, and he is oftener quoted in the every-day speeches of the people, in the pulpits and in the press, than any other writer of modern times. The sister province of New Brunswick, which in the old days was a part of Nova Scotia, takes as kindly to her Longfellow. "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and the "Building of the Ship," are taught as exercises in the schools, while "Hiawatha" is widely read, and has formed the task of many a youthful elocutionist in the recitation room. The winter described in that legend is almost the counterpart of the winter of northern New Brunswick, neither intensified nor overdrawn.

The literary activity of Ontario is represented by the city of Toronto, which is the centre of university life and motive. English poetry, in its higher form, finds expression in such types as Mr. Tennyson, and Mr. Browning, and often Mr. Swinburne, whose star is climbing to a prodigious height in the west, just now. These writers, sensibly enough, affect the intellectual development of Upper Canada; and particularly to the cultivated classes, to college people, among readers who lay aside their philosophy as they find it in Spencer, or Lewes, or Clifford, now and then, to dip into poetry, do these singers offer relaxation and amusement. Ontario poets, when they are not influenced by these purely English bards, sometimes follow Longfellow, though he has not altogether captivated their ear. University men are slow to rank him with Matthew Arnold, Shelley, or Arthur Hugh Clough, whom they all worship; but they read him all the same, and perhaps, admire him. They enjoy his fine culture, his superb scholarship, the melody of his verse, the beauty, and often sublimity of his thought; but Longfellow's christianity, and religious fervor which break out so frequently in his poetry, and which illumine so much of his work, they, apparently, do not wish to understand or recognize. I use

the words "university men" in this instance as signifying a type of character, and illustrative of a class. On the *people* of the western part of Canada, Longfellow's hold is very strong. They learn morality from him, and high endeavour, and nobility of purpose, and duty. His poetry has all the effect of beautiful music on the senses. It is stimulating, and encouraging, and warm. Not a line of it breathes an impurity or a base thought.

He may be too simple, but his very simplicity is his great source of strength.

He will always be regarded as a christian poet, as an educator of the people, as a teacher of the principles of freedom and liberty, and as a real humanizing agency, full of good works and truthfulness.

In Lower Canada, where the highest mental development is especially exemplified by the French writers, who do their work with singular grace and expression, and whose muse takes the *spirituelle* form, Longfellow's influence may be perceived to a large extent. His suggestiveness and harmony can frequently be seen in the poetry of such men as Fréchette, Routhier, Crémazie, Sulte and LeMay, and it is worth noting what a controlling tendency such minds as Longfellow's, DeMusset's and Béranger's have had on the intellectual action of these distinguished Canadian poets. The blending of American and French thought forms a striking combination, and its charming outcome may be easily grasped in many of the very delightful things which these singers have sent out. Pamphile LeMay, a graceful poet himself, and a writer of exquisite taste and feeling, has done much to encourage a love of Longfellow among his compatriots. It is said that by reading LeMay's "Evangeline" many persons were induced to learn English, that they might get the story at first hand and in the exact words of its creator. A great deal of the poem's present popularity among the French, is due to LeMay's efforts to crystalliz

it into the susceptible hearts of his countrymen. For many years, the Longfellow version of the story has been implicitly regarded as historically correct, even among Englishmen, who cared to accept no other authority. This one poem, because of the sympathy of the author, as well as his treatment of the incident, has wound itself around the hearts of the people of French Canada, and Longfellow's name is reverently treasured and respected and loved wherever "Evangeline" has found a foot-hold. In this connection, it will be found as well to read "Jacques et Marie," Mr. Napoleon Bourassa's spirited account of the dispersed Acadians, and the sufferings and adventures through which they passed. Mr. Bourassa is one of our own authors, an artist both in pigments and in letters, and his admirable souvenir of the wholesale eviction, is one of the most interesting historical narratives which we have, from the French point of view. Mr. James Hannay, of New Brunswick, has also treated the subject at length in his "History of Acadia," and presents the English or historical version of the incident. The late Dr. W. J. Anderson, of Quebec, published in the Transactions of this society, part VII, 1870, an instructive paper, entitled: *Evangeline and the Archives of Nova Scotia*, in which he discusses the poem by the aid of Dr. T. B. Aikins' valuable volume of Nova Scotia Archives. Mr. Beamish Murdoch's History of Nova Scotia, or Acadie, might also be consulted with advantage by the student.

It is pretty generally known, I think, that the author never saw the spot which he depicts with such fidelity in this poem. He was sitting in his study, once, when the story was told to him by Hawthorne, who had it from a friend who wished him to make a romance out of it. The novelist had it from a gentleman named Conolly, who in turn, had learned it from a French-Canadian, whose name, unfortunately, has escaped the record. Hawthorne jotted

down the tale in his note-book, as he heard it, and one day, he related it to Longfellow, who was so taken and impressed with it, that he begged permission to use it as the groundwork of an idyl. He did this, however, only when he found that his friend had abandoned all intention of employing the simple and tearful legend as a romance. He saw a very great deal in the story. It was full of poetry in his eyes, and his heart at once went out in sympathy for the exiles and the sore trials they were compelled to sustain. He studied Abbé Raynal for information about the home-life and habits of the Acadians, and his history he took from Haliburton. And what a poem he has made out of the slender materials! Evangeline has become a type of sweet and tender maidenhood, as much of a reality as "Imogen" or "Desdemona," as gentle a study as "Ophelia." She developes herself in the idyl, and lives in the human breast, this angelic Evangeline pride of the village:—

"Fair was she to behold, that maiden of seventeen summers.
Black were her eyes as the berry that grows on the thorn by the way-side,
Black, yet how softly they gleamed beneath the brown shade of her tresses!
Sweet was her breath as the breath of kine that feed in the meadows.
When in the harvest heat she bore to the reapers at noontide
Flagons of home-brewed ale, ah! fair in sooth was the maiden.
Fairer was she when, on Sunday morn, while the bell from its turret
Sprinkled with holy sounds the air, as the priest with his hyssop
Sprinkles the congregation, and scatters blessings upon them,
Down the long street she passed, with the chaplet of beads and her missal,
Wearing her Norman cap, and her kirtle of blue, and the ear-rings,
Brought in the olden time from France, and since, as an heir-loom,
Handed down from mother to child, through long generations.
But a celestial brightness—a more ethereal beauty—
Shone on her face and encircled her form, when, after confession,
Homeward serenely she walked with God's benediction upon her.
When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music."

Such is the portrait of Evangeline which Longfellow has sketched out for us. The poem is a profound study of the human emotions, subtle, intense and real. It is elevating in

its thought and morality, and presents a picture of womanly devotion, womanly affection and womanly sympathy, which no one can examine without feeling deeply moved. When the poet resolved to treat his theme, he looked about him for a suitable measure in which to cast his narrative. The English dactylic hexameter promptly suggested itself,—a metre made famous by Voss, in 1795, in his idyllic epic of "Luise", and later on by Goethe, in his "Hermann and Dorothea." Longfellow wrote Evangeline in that strain because, as he told "Barry Cornwall" in his letter accompanying a presentation copy of the poem, "I could not write it *as it is* in any other; it would have changed its character entirely to have put it into a different measure."

The critics are divided on the question of Longfellow's masterpiece, the "Song of Hiawatha" contending eagerly for first place with the tale of "Acadie." The latter was the author's own favourite, but those who have studied the two poems well, and measured their relative strength as pieces of artistic workmanship, accord the palm to the Indian legend, which presents, in such a marked degree, a true story of the forest, of rugged nature and of wild life in all seasons of the year, in the poet's own country. Hiawatha is in every way, an heroic achievement in poetry. Frothingham considers it Longfellow's "masterpiece, the fullest expression of his mind. Theme and treatment perfectly correspond, the former calling forth all the poet's peculiar talent; the latter taxing, yet exquisitely illustrating, his literary skill." Rossetti said it was "made for posterity and permanence." Henry Norman considers it "an example of genuine poetic power and sympathy misapplied," and thinks that it has exerted "a weakening influence on American literature," but he is clearly wrong in that assumption. The poem is full of touches of nature. The character-drawing is admirable, and exhibits remarkable familiarity with all aspects of savage life and custom. The

poet calls it an edda, and it treats of a tradition current among the Ojibway tribe of Indians, the scene being located on the southern shore of Lake Superior, in the region between the Pictured Rocks and the Grand Sable. The measure of the poem is the eight syllable trochaic verse, and it has been parodied and imitated more than any other piece of our day. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes thinks that Longfellow, in choosing this peculiar metre, showed "a subtle sense of the requirements of his simple story of a primitive race," his strain being the "most fluid of measures, that lets the thought run through it in easy sing-song, such as oral tradition would be sure to find on the lips of the story-tellers of the wigwam." Hiawatha is, perhaps, the best appreciated, as it has been the most widely read, of the poet's longer pieces. There are dramatic fire, strong movement, vigorous description, humour and pathos, and all the elements of a great epic in this tuneful story. The Wooing, the Wedding Feast, the Lamentation, and the Famine, exhibit various aspees of the poet's genius, and shew in wonderful light, his mastery over the canons of imagery, and his skill in bringing out the essence of the great forces of nature while at work. In this grand manner he describes the awful winter, and the famine which followed the storm, the cruel blast and the cold:—

"O the long and dreary winter!
O the cold and cruel winter!
Ever thicker, thicker, thicker
Froze the ice on lake and river,
Ever deeper, deeper, deeper
Fell the snow o'er all the landscape,
Fell the covering snow, and drifted
Through the forest, round the village.
Hardly from the buried wigwam
Could the hunter force a passage;
With his mittens and his snow-shoes
Vainly walked he through the forest,
Sought for bird or beast and found none,

Saw no track of deer or rabbit,
In the snow beheld no foot-prints,
In the ghastly, gleaming forest
Fell, and could not rise from weakness,
Perished there from cold and hunger.
O the famine and the fever!
O the wasting of the famine!
O the blasting of the fever!
O the wailing of the children!
O the anguish of the women!"

The poet then tells of the entrance into Hiawatha's wigwam, of Famine, "Buckadawin," and of Fever, "Ahkosewin," and of the death and burial of lovely "Minnehaha," the bride of the young brave :—

"In the snow a grave they made her,
In the forest deep and darksome,
Underneath the moaning hemlocks;
Clothed her in her richest garments,
Wrapped her in her robes of ermine,
Covered her with snow, like ermine;
Thus they buried Minnehaha."

Though Hiawatha was violently attacked by the critics, it found great favour with the public, and the printing-press was soon taxed to its capacity to supply the demand. The publishers, however, bitterly resented the newspaper and magazine opinions which came to them by every mail. One day, Mr. Fields, more exercised than usual, by the budget of attacks and parodies which he had received that morning, hurried off to Longfellow's house in Cambridge in a state of extraordinary excitement. "My dear Longfellow," he called out as soon as he caught a glimpse of the poet, "these atrocious libels must be stopped." The poet, serene and calm, glanced over the papers, and without a word of comment, archly said, as he handed them back to the publisher, "by the way, Fields, how is 'Hiawatha' selling?" "Wonderfully, none of your books has ever had

such a sale." "Then," said Longfellow softly and with a smile, "I think we had better let these people go on advertising it." In the short space of two years, fifty thousand copies were sold in the United States alone.

But Longfellow cared very little for the attacks of critics or enemies. He used to say that whenever he encountered anything unpleasant about him in his newspaper, or in articles sent him by those good-natured friends who think that authors like to read such things, he would look at a few lines, and then quietly throw the offensive thing into the fire, and *it would never trouble him again.*

Dr. Japp, author of a study of Thoreau, who writes learnedly of the Puritan element in Longfellow, finds something of that quality in the poem of "Hiawatha," and traces its movement and play of fancy through the light of that agency. But Longfellow's puritanism is more strongly emphasized in the "Courtship of Miles Standish," and in the "New England Tragedies," which breathe out in every line, the true spirit of the doctrine of that faith. "Standish" is the greater poem, more dramatic even than the tragedies, more spirited in movement, and the warm pulsating figures with which it is peopled, lend a genuine reality and verisimilitude to the performance. There is a certain grim and dry humour developed by the poet in this quaint conceit. The gruff puritan captain, too busy to do his own courting, despatches his friend and companion at arms, comely John Alden, to the home of the modest and fair Priscilla, one of the charmingest maidens in poetry, and bids him woo her for him. In war and in great affairs the captain's maxim, from a boy, had been "if you wish a thing to be well done, you must do it yourself, you must not leave it to others," but an affair of the heart was quite too trivial, and love, he thought, could be developed just as well by proxy. Perhaps, the old bear thought that he could command a maiden's heart as he could command his army of twelve soldiers.

Alden set out on his task. On the way he plucked some may-flowers for Priscilla, whom he really loved himself, though he dared not say so. His passion was returned, though so well concealed, that the brave and lithe young fellow scarcely knew his good fortune. When he saw her that day singing and spinning in her quiet home, he might have had her for his bride for the asking, but his friendship for Standish stood in the way, and he began to ply the suit of his chief. He lost all his *finesse*, and bluntly delivered his message like a schoolboy. Priscilla, annoyed and vexed, could not brook such a system of business-like love-making. She spoke out, and we may be sure her cheeks tingled with roses :—

'If the great captain of Plymouth is so very eager to wed me,
Why does he not come himself, and take the trouble to woo me?
If I am not worth the wooing, I surely am not worth the winning!'
Then John Alden began explaining and smoothing the matter,
Making it worse as he went, by saying the captain was busy,—
Had no time for such things;—such things! the words grating harshly
Fell on the ear of Priscilla; and swift as a flash she made answer:
'Has he no time for such things, as you call it, before he is married,
Would he be likely to find it, or make it, after the wedding?
That in the way with you men; you don't understand us, you cannot.
When you have made up your minds, after thinking of this one and that one,
Choosing, selecting, rejecting, comparing one with another,
Then you make known your desire, with abrupt and sudden avowal,
And are offended and hurt, and indignant perhaps, that a woman
Does not respond at once to a love that she never suspected.'

In this strain the poem goes on. Alden tries to make matters better for his friend, but all in vain. The more he tries, the deeper involved he becomes. He gets warm and excited over his praises of Standish, who could trace his pedigree back to the days of Thurston de Standish.

"But as he warmed and glowed, in his simple and eloquent language,
Quite forgetful of self, and full of the praise of his rival,
Archly the maiden smiled, and, with eyes overrunning with laughter,
Said, in a tremulous voice, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

And the sequel to all this delightful fooling was that John and Priscilla were married, and when the grim captain got over his rage and mortification he forgave them both, like the brave and hearty soldier that he was.

But, as Longfellow somewhere else says:—

> "No one is so accursed by fate,
> No one so utterly desolate,
> But some heart, though unknown,
> Responds unto his own,"

Miles Standish won a wife at last. One Barbara came out to the colony in the "Fortune," and the captain having learned wisdom by sad experience, this time did his own courting. The kindly maiden smiled upon his suit, and the twain were made one. Six children blessed their union, and many of their descendants are still in the land of the living.

During the time that transcendentalism,—that airy shadow of forty years ago,—was shaping the thought and poetry of New England, Longfellow held aloof from its teachings, and clung to his puritanism. His verse, always mellow and free-flowing, was unchilled by its influence, and unclouded by its presence. It sometimes guided him into a statelier form of measure than he usually employed in his rhythmical lyrics, but it never really controlled his muse. He yielded to sudden impulse, now and then, and wrote often when impelled by some power which he could not shake off, but this influence cannot be traced to the puritanism in his nature, which usually had the effect of checking exuberancy rather than promoting or stimulating it.

Most of Longfellow's better known poems have a history. The late James T. Fields, who was intimate with the poet, knew the origin of several of them, and has left recorded the interesting story of their birth. The "Psalm of Life," the oft-quoted burst of song which sprang from the poet's

inmost heart, was written when Longfellow was only thirty-one years of age. He was sitting between two windows, at a small table in his chamber, looking out on a bright summer morning in July, 1838, when the beautiful Psalm came into his mind, and with scarcely an effort, he penned the lines where he sat. His heart was very full, and he kept the poem by him for some months before he gave it to the world. It was a voice from his very soul, and he could not send it out then, for his own heart was bleeding over a private grief. The poem of "The Reaper and the Flowers" also came without an effort, and the line "There is a Reaper, whose name is Death," crystallized immediately into his mind, and as he rapidly wrote down the stanzas, his eyes filled with tears. "The light of Stars" was composed on a serene and beautiful summer evening, exactly suggestive of the poem. "The Wreck of the Hesperus" was written in 1839. A storm had occurred the night before, and as the poet sat musing and smoking his pipe, about midnight, by the fire, the wrecked "Hesperus" came sailing into his mind. He jotted down some lines, then went to bed, but the mad idea seized him and he could not sleep. He got up, and wrote the celebrated verses, which gave him part of his fame. The clock struck three, when the minstrel's last verse was done:—

"Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this,
On the reef of Norman's Woe!"

That other noble ballad, "The Skeleton in Armour," appeared in 1849. The vision encountered him as he was riding along the beach at Newport, on a summer's afternoon. A short time before that a skeleton had been dug up at Fall River, clad in broken and corroded armour. It made a profound impression on the poet, who connected the skeleton

with the Round Tower, usually known to the people in the vicinity, as the Old Windmill. At the present day, the tower is claimed by the Danes as the work of their early ancestors. So reliable an authority as Professor Rafn inclines to this view, and declares the structure to be a genuine specimen of architecture, built not later than the 12th century. This applies, of course, to the original building at Newport only, and not to the "improvements" that it has received from time to time, since it was first erected. There are several such alterations in the upper part of the building which cannot be mistaken, and were probably used in modern times for different purposes The windmill was a later alteration, but the base remains in all its ancient glory. These are the materials which supplied Longfellow with a theme for a ballad. The skeleton would not be laid until the solitary horseman promised a poem. "Excelsior" owes its origin to accident. The poet happened to see the word on a torn piece of newspaper, one autumn night in 1841. It at once fired his imagination, and taking up a slip of paper, which happened to be the back of a letter received that day from Charles Sumner, he crowded it with verses. "The Old Clock on the Stairs,"—one of the most dramatic things that the author has given us, was based on a remarkable sermon which a great French divine, *Père* Jacques Bridaine preached on eternity in 1754, at the Church of Saint Sulpice, in Paris. He compared eternity to the pendulum of a clock, which ceaselessly murmured *Toujours! Jamais! Jamais! Toujours!* Forever, never, never, forever! This sermon caused extraordinary excitement at the time in the French capital and people were driven, in some instances, into insanity over the wild thought which grew from too much pondering over the idea. As soon as Longfellow read the sermon he was struck with its awful power, and the startling figure which it conveyed. He could not get it out

his mind for several days. "Toujours, jamais, jamais, toujours," ran in his head, and his thoughts turned incessantly to the musical refrain. He was haunted as if by a nightmare, and was himself again, only when he had completed his poem :—

"Never here, forever there,
Where all parting, pain and care,
And death, and time shall disappear,—
Forever there, but never here,
The horologe of Eternity
Sayeth this incessantly,—
'Forever—never!
Never—forever!'"

Longfellow achieved distinction as a translator. He was familiar with many foreign languages. His reading was varied and wide, and many an old legend was turned to good account. In the by-ways of Europe he found a vast quantity of well-nigh forgotten tales, and some of his best appreciated poems owe their existence to some humble story or incident in folk lore. His greatest effort, however, in the way of translation, is his version in English of Dante. For a long time, Cary's copy was the recognized edition, and so far back as 1809, the *North American Review* pronounced it, with confidence, the most literal translation in poetry, in our language, and Prescott wrote, in 1824, of Cary, "I think Dante would have given him a place in his ninth heaven, if he could have foreseen his translation. It is most astonishing, giving not only the literal corresponding phrases, but the spirit of the original, the true Dantesque manner. It should be cited as an evidence of the compactness, the pliability, the sweetness of the English tongue." In 1839, the year when Longfellow published five passages from the Purgatorio, Cary's reputation stood higher than it did in 1824. A recent writer, George W. Greene, who died in the early part of this year (1883), and

a man well versed in the Italian language and poetry, made a masterly review of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and instanced comparisons between Cary and Longfellow, and unhesitatingly stated that the latter's work, with its fourteen thousand two hundred and seventy-eight lines, corresponds, word for word, with the original Italian; and no one claims that much for Cary. The leading scholars of the day, Charles Eliot Norton among the number, unite in the opinion that Longfellow's translation is the only pure English version of the Italian, and must be accepted as the standard. Mr. Greene, in his estimate, was very careful and impartial, and the long excerpts which he made, proved the best authorities he could have for his statements. When the poet was engaged in correcting the proof-sheets of the Inferno, he invited Mr. Norton and Mr. James Russell Lowell, to aid him in the work of final revision. The former gentleman, then professor of the history of Art at Harvard university, gives this brief account of their meetings:—"Every Wednesday evening," he says, "Mr. Lowell and I met in Mr. Longfellow's study, to listen while he read a canto of his translation from the proof-sheet. We paused over every doubtful passage, discussed the various readings, considered the true meaning of obscure words and phrases, sought for the most exact equivalent of Dante's expression, objected, criticized, praised with a freedom that was made perfect by Mr. Longfellow's absolute sweetness, simplicity and modesty, and by the entire confidence which existed between us." Longfellow performed his task,—a real labour of love,—with perfect sympathy. While at work, he wrote to a friend, "how different from the gossip is the divine Dante with which I begin the morning! I write a few lines every day before breakfast. It is the first thing I do—the morning prayer, the key-note of the day."

There was a sad tragedy in the poet's life, and for a while

it threatened to cloud his whole future, but time, that sublime healer of all our woes and sorrows, intervened, and after some anxious years had passed away, the golden sunshine streamed into Longfellow's heart again, and glad songs from his muse once more trilled upon the air. He had been twice married. His first wife was Mary Storer Potter, daughter of the Hon. Barrett Potter, of Portland, Me., a descendant of one of the founders of the New Haven Colony. His bride was a very lovely woman, accomplished in several branches of science, languages and literature, beautiful in person and amiable in disposition. The marriage took place in the month of September, 1831, but the happy domestic life of the poet was destined to be of short duration. In November, 1836, Mrs. Longfellow died at Rotterdam, and her husband tenderly commemorated her worth and gentleness in his touching poem, entitled "The footsteps of Angels." But it was in connection with his second marriage, that one of the sorest trials which ever came to man, occurred to Longfellow. The reader of that delicate and pleasantly-told story, "Hyperion," is doubtless familiar with the incident illustrating the meeting of "Paul Flemming" and "Mary Ashburton," and what followed after those attractive young people had been together some time. In real life, Longfellow met Frances Elizabeth Appleton in much the same way. She was the brilliant daughter of Nathan Appleton, of Boston, and the sister of Thomas Gold Appleton, who judges paintings as well as he writes books. Underwood, who knew her intimately, describes her as the possessor of every grace of "mind and person that could charm the soul of a poet." He says, "her remarkable beauty was fitly accompanied by a serene dignity of manner; and it may be added that, later, as a matron, she was even more beautiful than in her fresh youth. With her children about her she looked a proud Cornelia." Longfellow's story was published in 1839. It will be remembered

that the hero is rejected by Mary Ashburton. So, it is said, that Longfellow's suit was not at first acceptable to Miss Appleton, that he too was dismissed, but as the years wore on a change came over her, and she claimed a woman's privilege and changed her mind. When the romance was published, everybody seemed to know that Paul and Mary had living prototypes in the poet and his sweetheart, and the arch song, beginning "I know a maiden fair to see," had a delicious significance. This ballad occurs in "Hyperion," and as a reminder, I may quote a verse or two :—

"I know a maiden fair to see ;
Take care !
She can both false and friendly be.
Beware ! Beware !
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee !

She has two eyes, so soft and brown ;
Take care !
She gives a side-glance and looks down.
Beware ! Beware !
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee !"

And the last verse :—

"She gives thee a garland woven fair ;
Take care !
It is a fool's cap for thee to wear.
Beware ! Beware !
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee !"

Of course that sort of thing could not go on long. The lady yielded to her passionate lover of thirty-five, and in July, 1843, the two were wed. Of this union, five children were born, two sons and three daughters, Ernest, the Artist, and Charles, the Cavalry Captain, Alice and Anna,

and "Edith with golden hair." Thomas Buchanan Read, who wrote the martial poem of "Sheridan's Ride," painted the three daughters as children. The picture was afterwards engraved and sold. The grouping of the young ladies left the impression that one of them had no arms, and so natural was this appearance, that the poet was often asked if one of his children had really been born without arms. A few years ago, Miss Edith was married to Richard H. Dana, son of the author of "Two years before the mast," and the eminent counsel in behalf of the United States, during the sitting of the Halifax Fishery Commission.

Longfellow took his bride to the spacious Craigie house, in Cambridge, Washington's old head-quarters, after the battle of Bunker Hill. "This famous house," wrote Dr. Lyman Abbott, in 1881, "with its great fireplaces, its generously proportioned rooms, its hospitable hall and broad staircase, its quaint carvings and tiles, is itself an historic poem. The study is a busy literary man's workshop; the table is piled with pamphlets and papers in orderly confusion; a high desk in one corner suggests a practice of standing while writing, and gives a hint of one secret of the poet's singularly erect form at an age when the body generally begins to stoop and the shoulders to grow round; an orange tree stands in one window, near it a stuffed stork keeps watch; by the side of the open fire is the 'children's chair,' on the table is Coleridge's inkstand; upon the walls are crayon likenesses of Emerson, Hawthorne and Sumner, and in one of the bookcases which fill all the spare wall-space and occupies even one of the windows, are rarest treasures of all, the poet's own works in their original manuscript, carefully preserved in handsome substantial bindings. The study was Washington's room, the parlour opposite was known as "Lady Washington's parlour." The family library, a delightful, long, many-windowed apartment in the rear, was appropriated under

Washington to the aides-de-camp." This old house is worth a pilgrimage to see. It is historic in two departments of human activity, war and peace. Once Miss Longfellow asked a rosy-cheeked child at Sunday School, why Americans kept Washington's birth-day, and received for an answer from the urchin, "because he lived in your house." Edward Everett, and Jared Sparks, the historian, lived in this grand and stately dwelling once, and so did Joseph Worcester, the lexicographer, and the list of eminent persons who have, from time to time, spent one or more nights under its hospitable roof, would swell to the dimensions of a large book, if recalled. At this residence, the poet received many strange visitors. An Englishman called there once, and after a word or two, he said, "My dear sir, you have no old ruins in this country, and so I thought I would come and *see you.*" A lady from the same locality, on being introduced, exclaimed, "Why Mr. Longfellow, I thought you were dead!" "No, madam, you see I take the liberty of living." "Yes,—but, I thought you belonged to Washington's time." But perhaps the best of the anecdotes told of the poet, is the one related by William Winter, who had it some years ago from Longfellow himself. A gentleman was led up to the bard, and presented, when he cried out, with enthusiasm, "Mr. Longfellow, I have long ago desired the honour of knowing you. Sir, I am one of the *few* men who have read your Evangeline."

Longfellow took his bride to his pleasant home, and they lived happily together until July 4th, 1861, when the fearful tragedy occurred. Mrs. Longfellow was seated in a room with her husband and children. She was dressed in flowing muslin, and while engaged in some household duty, by sad mischance her garments caught fire from a lighted match. In a moment, she was all aflame. Mr. Longfellow lost no time in seizing a large rug, which he attempted to roll about her to extinguish the fire, but his efforts were

vain. She had received injuries which proved mortal, and very soon she died. Her husband's hands and face were severely burned, and his grief and horror at his terrible loss aged him in a night. The poet was never quite himself again from that dreadful moment. He kept his grief to himself, and nursed in his heart the sweet and fragrant memory of the kindly woman he had loved so dearly.

Longfellow was peculiarly the children's poet. He was ever available to them, and loved them all tenderly, and never failed to give them pleasant greeting at all seasons and at all times. He entertained some school girls at his house one day, and one of them, out of gratitude, sent him an iron pen made from a fetter of Bonnivard, the prisoner of Chillon, immortalized by Byron, and a bit of wood from the frigate "Constitution," ornamented with precious stones from Siberia, Ceylon and the State of Maine. Back to the young maiden came a poem of thanks, addressed to "Beautiful Helen of Maine." Of the gift, he says that it is to him:—

> "As a drop of the dew of your youth
> On the leaves of an aged tree."

The children of Cambridge presented him with an armchair, on the 27th of February, 1879, on the occasion of his seventy-second birth-day. It was made of the wood of the Village Blacksmith's Chestnut tree. For this charming testimonial he returned some graceful verses, the concluding lines being:—

> "Only your love and your remembrance could
> Give life to this dead wood,
> And make these branches, leafless now so long,
> Blossom again in song."

Luigi Monti, who saw the incident himself, tells of a little girl, who on one Christmas-day enquired the way to the poet's house, and asked permission to step into the yard.

On Longfellow being told that she was there, he went to the door and called her in, and showed her the "old clock on the stairs," and some other things, which we may believe, were of especial interest to her. The child went away at last filled with grateful recollections of that Christmastide. But Longfellow was forever doing kindly and generous things, and his warm, loving heart went out to the little ones always.

In person, he was a handsome man. His mien was thoughtful, his figure erect as an arrow, and his eye was blue and liquid, and full of good humour, and his manner was as gentle as a woman's. The world to him was always very beautiful. He looked out upon it, and saw there, only the sweetnesses of life, bright realities and the goodness of God, and he sought to make all those around him happy, contented and joyous. The world too, was very good to him, and when he died he had his share of years and honours. His record is the record of one who lived a blameless life. The world was brighter because he was in it, and now that he has passed away, his name and work survive. Men of the future will keep his memory green, and the story of his splendid manhood, and the undying treasures of his verse, will never fade from people's minds, nor perish in the gaunt march of centuries :—

"He is dead, the sweet musician !
He the sweetest of all singers !
He has gone from us forever,
He has moved a little nearer,
To the master of all music,
To the master of all singing."